

PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS ANNOUNCE THE FIRST HUMAN CASE OF WEST NILE VIRUS INFECTION IN LONG BEACH

LONG BEACH- An elderly Long Beach resident has been infected with the West Nile Virus (WNV), Darryl M. Sexton, MD, City Health Officer announced today. The patient is under medical care and remains hospitalized. This is the first known human case of WNV infection identified in Long Beach since evidence of the virus appeared in 2003 with dead birds, which tested positive for the virus. No human fatalities due to WNV have been reported to date in the City of Long Beach.

The WNV was first detected in the United States in 1999 in New York and has migrated west. As of 5:00 p.m. August 4, 2004, a total of 85 WNV infections have been reported from San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, Imperial, Kern, and Fresno counties. Five of these WNV infections were initially detected in asymptomatic individuals through screening done at blood banks - one of these individuals later became symptomatic.

WNV remains a public health concern. The virus has claimed the life of two individuals in Southern California. A 57-year old Orange County man died in June and a 75-year old male from San Bernardino County died this in late July, making them the first to die in California from WNV.

The State of California Department of Health Services (DHS) has confirmed mosquitoes carrying WNV have been found in the City in an area serviced by the City of Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Vector Control Program and the Greater Los Angeles County Vector Control District. The DHHS has also confirmed that several dead American crows, recently found in Long Beach, were infected with WNV.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported confirmation of over 400 human cases of WNV infection in the United States in 20 States. Human WNV infections in California are expected increase since WNV has been detected earlier than projected this year.

City of Long Beach Public Health Officials are continuing to take precautions to prevent the spread of infection in the City and are urging residents to decrease their risk of WNV by reducing mosquito breeding.

Mosquito monitoring and abatement are key goals of the DHHS' Vector Control Program. The Program monitors and controls mosquito breeding in public areas by setting mosquito traps in breeding areas, and by mitigating mosquito populations by spraying for mosquitoes with larvacides and adulticides in public areas with stagnant water such as wetlands, streets, curbsides, pump stations, and abandoned swimming pools. The DHHS also treats flood control channels and storm water runoff systems.

City Public Health officials emphasize that the overall risk of contracting WNV infection and serious illness to humans from WNV is low. Most individuals who become infected with WNV will have no symptoms. Approximately 10 percent to 15 percent of infected individuals will have mild to moderate symptoms of fever, headache and body aches. **Less than one percent of individuals will develop serious neurological illnesses such as encephalitis and meningitis. However, the elderly and those with lowered immune systems are more susceptible to serious illness.**

Since infected mosquitoes spread WNV, local residents can significantly assist assistance in reducing local risk of virus exposure by eliminating standing water on their private property to prevent breeding of mosquitoes. WNV is transmitted to humans and animals through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected with WNV when they feed on infected birds. As temperatures rise, mosquito populations are expected to increase. With this increase in the mosquito population, chances for WNV transmission will become higher.

The DHHS Vector Control Program controls mosquito breeding on a regular basis in public areas. However, the DHHS needs the assistance of local residents to keep mosquito breeding to a minimum on private property. Residents are requested to take the following precautions to protect themselves and control mosquito breeding:

- Remove pools of standing or stagnant water, which provide a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Debris piles, buckets, barrels, kid's toys, and tire swings are some common sources of stagnant water. Mosquitoes need water to complete their life cycle, therefore they are most active around stagnant water;
- Clear gutters and drains of standing water;
- Change water in birdbaths frequently;

- Properly maintain clean swimming pools and spas with proper filtration and chlorination levels;
- Limit the watering of lawns and outdoor plants to twice a week to avoid run off to gutters and around sprinklers;
- Limit your time outdoors when you notice mosquito activity (primarily at dusk and dawn). If you remain outdoors while mosquitoes are biting, wear clothing that provides more coverage of your skin (such as long sleeved shirts and pants);
- Use mosquito repellents containing DEET. **Residents should follow instructions on the label. Consult with your child's pediatrician for appropriate concentrations to be used on children under the age of two.**
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.

Businesses are also urged to check their property weekly and eliminate any standing or stagnant water and to maintain swimming pools to summertime conditions. Green or dirty pools can breed thousands of mosquitoes in a week's time, unnecessarily increasing the population's risk of contracting WNV.

American crows, as well as jays, magpies, fitches, ravens, and other birds of the Corvidae species are especially susceptible to WNV infection. The DHHS is requesting residents to cooperate by reporting dead birds which appear recently dead, have no injuries and have no evidence of predator trauma by calling **1-877-WNV-BIRD**. If authorities do not pick up the bird within 24 hours, residents are being advised to dispose of the bird remains. The public should not handle dead birds with their bare hands. If individuals must remove a dead bird, use a shovel, cardboard or plastic bag to handle the bird, and then it should be placed in a plastic trash bag for disposal.

If you have any questions regarding mosquito control and monitoring measures in the City of Long Beach, please feel free to contact the DHHS' Vector Control Program at (562) 570-4132 or go the DHHS' website at www.longbeach.gov/health. To report standing curbside water that has been present for longer than two days, please call the Vector Control Program or the City of Long Beach Public Works Department at (562) 570-2700.

Further information about the WNV may be obtained at the State of California Department of Health Services website at www.westnile.ca.gov, or at the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile.